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ABSTRACT

The designation of the Japanese word class "joshi" (in English known as particles, post-positional case markers, or relationals) by the term te-ni-wo-ha can be traced to the early superimposition of the Chinese writing system on Japanese speech. Because of the structural differences between the two languages and the existence of elements in Japanese not covered by the Chinese writing system, the Japanese developed a notational chart of dots to be added to the Chinese characters. Such a dot-code system was used to express relationships of the joshi and was designated te-ni-wo-ha by combining the names of the particles at the four corners of the chart. The term te-ni-wo-ha remains today even though the original dot-code system no longer exists and the Chinese characters used for writing Japanese are phonological representations containing no graphic, inherently syntactic indication of meaning. (VM)

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The Te-ni-wo-ha: An Etymological Study[1]

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In studying the Japanese language, the student will eventually encounter the term te-ni-wo-ha, which refers to that class of function forms commonly known to Japanese grammarians and teachers as joshi, usually translated into English as 'particles'. These are what Western analysts have variously termed, relationals, case-relational markers, postpositions, topic markers, verbal and adjectival inflections, nominalizers or conjunctives. The term te-ni-wo-ha designates this entire class by naming only four of the many particles in this fixed order, much as the syllabic signs are named in the fixed order i-ro-ha. These four particles are, indeed, the commonest particles, and from that fact alone the use of them as a class designation is understandable. However, the history of names for the class and for the symbols in which they are written is more complex and, one hopes, worthy of study.

Introduction of Chinese Writing into Japan

1.1. It is generally accepted that the Chinese writing system was introduced into Japan sometime during the third or fourth century A.D. Because of the highly advanced civilization flourishing in mainland China, Chinese culture was regarded and respected as a model of learning. So high was the prestige of Chinese culture in the Far East that it attracted the interests of scholars from the surrounding countries. Japan was one of these countries which adopted much from this advanced culture. Of course this included the sophisticated Chinese writing system, which was apparently borrowed without much concern as to how it would fit into the already existing structure of the oral Japanese language. The superimposition of this writing (orthographic) system upon spoken Japanese in due course caused linguistic problems because the existing Japanese structures could not readily fit into the ways of reading and writing the Chinese characters.[2]

1.2. The above basically syntactic (structural) problem may be explained by the difference in the typological classification of the two languages.[3] Chinese is largely monosyllabic in that there is a high degree of coincidence between the individual syllables and semantic units; furthermore, the order of these semantic units is freely used for signalling syntactic relationships. In short, Chinese is one of the 'isolating' languages.

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The Japanese language, on the other hand, is 'polysyllabic' having no high degree of coincidence between the syllable and the semantic unit. Japanese is often considered to be a member of the 'agglutinative' group of languages, since the terminals of various kinds (e.g., sentence finals, constituent finals, and internal particles) indicate the full grammatical relationships among the word classes of a sentence. This agglutinating grammatical pattern had been established in the oral Japanese language long before the time of the introduction of the Chinese writing system into Japan.

Kana and Wo-koto Ten

2.1. One of the main problems in using the Chinese writing system for Japanese can be traced to these above syntactic differences; no equivalent Chinese characters existed for the 'particles' of the Japanese language. Chinese characters could, of course, be easily used for all sentence constituents common to both languages, but not for Japanese items which did not exist in Chinese. Since there was a basic difference between the sentence patterns of the two languages, some changes had to be made by the innovators in order to use the Chinese writing system for writing the Japanese language.

2.2. One group of Japanese scholars of the Nara period (710-784 A.D.) attempted to overcome these problems by abandoning the meaning and the ordering of the Chinese characters and used them only for their phonetic values. In this system, referred to as the Manyō-gana, whenever the need for a particular 'particle' arose for writing a Japanese expression, these scholars would use a Chinese character that represented the required Japanese sound when pronounced in the proper Chinese manner.[4] The system functioned, therefore, a little as if a speaker of Spanish would use the Arabic numeral 3 (tres) to represent the sound and meaning of the English word trace. This manner of reading and writing reduced the Chinese characters to little more than a phonetic alphabet. Their original semantic value was lost and only a phonetic value was preserved. To read such writing was almost like reading a rebus; the Japanese readers pronounced the sequence of signs and guessed the meaning of the sentence from its sound without regard to the original semantic values of the Chinese characters.

2.3. Another system that was developed during this early period for adapting Chinese writing to Japanese was the use of the wo-koto ten (wo-koto dots or the wo-koto chart). More an aid to reading the written Chinese sentence than a writing system, this was merely a systematic annotation of the Chinese text to indicate the syntactic relationships within the text for the Japanese reader. It functioned more or less as a syntactic decoding device. Small symbolic annotations were placed beside the Chinese charac-

ters to indicate the function of these words in the semantically equivalent Japanese sentence.[5]

2.4. As an indication of how early the te-ni-wo-ha or 'particles' were in existence, consider the following references to the te-ni-wo-ha in an ancient literary work, the poems of Ōtomo no Yakamochi (?-785 A.D.) from his footnotes in the Manyō-shū; in these, Yakamochi makes an obvious attempt to excuse his omission of the te-ni-wo-ha:

毛 能 波 三 箇 辞 闕 之
(mo) (no) (ha) (three-units) (particles) (lack) (this)[6]
'From this are omitted the three particles mo, no and ha'.

毛 能 波 氐 爾 乎 六 箇 辞
(mo) (no) (ha) (te) (ni) (wo) (six-units) (particles)
闕 之
(lack) (this).[7]
'From this are omitted the six particles mo, no, ha, te, ni, and wo'.

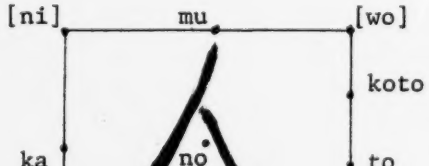
Since the poet acknowledges the omission of these 'particles', we have clear evidence that they were normally used and that this concept of 'articles' as a class existed as early as the Nara period (8th century).

Defining Te-ni-wo-ha

3.1. Even though we know, then, that the te-ni-wo-ha were used at an early time, it is not clear where or how the term te-ni-wo-ha originated. Fumio Ōtsuki (1874-1928), one of the pioneers of traditional Japanese grammar, defined and described this class in his dictionary, Dai-Genkai, as follows:[8]

> '[Te-ni-wo-ha] are [grammatical] forms which exist among words, constructions and sentences. They connect the words which precede them in the sentence with those that follow--this is the term for such types of words [te-ni-wo-ha]. For instance, [note] the te-ni-wo-ha in
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | it-te miru | "go and see" |
> | uma ni noru | "ride on the horse" |
> | hana wo miru | "observe the flower" |
> | kaze ha [=wa] huku | "the wind blows" |
>
> There are many of this type [of words], and they are classified into three [sub-] groups' (Ōtsuki 1935:37).

3.2. In the supplement, Gohō-shinan (or Manual of Language Usage), added to this dictionary, Ōtsuki gave a full-length explanation of the te-ni-wo-ha class. Following a short definition similar to the one above, Ōtsuki attempted to form a etymological statement as follows:

> '[The class te-ni-wo-ha,] in ancient times, was used in reading Chinese literature [a language structurally dissimilar to Japanese]. Since [the Japanese scholars at that time] did not utilize such devices as the side-script of the later generations, they created a [graphic] device that had some ten fixed dots on a square which were to decode the Chinese structures [into Japanese] according to rules established [by groups of scholars or priests of Buddhist sects]. The following diagram is an example of such a code. For instance, if there is a dot on the left "shoulder" of the letter hito [or "man"] as 亻, it is to be read hito-ni [or "to the man"; ni for the termination, receiver of the action or the result of change].
>
> A chart of the wo-koto ten positions
>
> 
>
>
> If the dot is on the right shoulder [as 人], it is to be read as hito wo [or "to the man"; wo for the means or receiver of the action].' (Ōtsuki 1935:37).

As for the origin of the name wo-koto ten, Ōtsuki continues:

> 'By adopting the first two dots wo and koto on the right shoulder [of the square], this system was called the wo-koto ten [dots]...also if [you] read the dots from the left leg to the left shoulder and then to the right shoulder to the right leg, they spell te-ni-wo-ha which appears to be the origin of the term'(Ōtsuki 1935:37).[9]

3.3 At this point, the reader will note that it would be easy to confuse these dots when they occur with the body of more complicated Chinese characters having a greater number of

strokes. To avoid this confusion, and to facilitate recognition of the wo-koto ten, the general practice was to use red ink, called shu, for the dots (Hashimoto 1949:284).

Ōtsuki attempted further to elaborate his definition and description of te-ni-wo-ha after his explanation of the origin of the name:

> 'The majority of the members of the te-ni-wo-ha class are short and cannot function independently. However, [the te-ni-wo-ha] always exist in a [fixed] location and connect the meaning of [independent] words; indicate the direction of other words; lead the [total] theme; distinguish transitive and intransitive forms [of verbs]; separate and put words together; and indicate the proper location of words even when the word order is inverted--[from their function] they are just like the muscles of the joints or the hinges of a door' (Ōtsuki 1935:37).[10]

Te-ni-wo-ha: Its Development

4.1. The next question is how did the Japanese at the time of the introduction of the Chinese writing system come to invent the wo-koto ten system? It is generally believed that the Japanese must have studied Chinese literary history and found out that the Chinese scholars of the T'ang Dynasty added 'dots' at the four corners of the characters (ideographs) to note the tonal differences that indicated word meaning (Hashimoto 1949:285).

4.2. The reading process for the Japanese speaker after the development of the dot system was peculiarly complex. For the Chinese-educated Japanese, a sequence of characters would indicate a Chinese sentence which he would understand by a process of translation from Chinese to Japanese. For the Japanese speaker untrained in Chinese, the characters would be read by forming an internal sentence in Japanese; such a process is rare in the history of reading and one wonders whether to call it reading, translation, or a hybrid of both. Since the syntactic devices of the two languages were fundamentally different, the addition of the dots was a means of guiding the Japanese reader to a proper syntactic interpretation of the Chinese sentence, and so it is properly decoding. An analogy may make these processes clearer. Suppose an English-speaking student of Latin is faced with the Latin sentence

Matrem puella amat.

Suppose also his Latin-English dictionary indicates the translation of the words to be "mother", "girl", and "love",

respectively. He will still not be sure who is loving whom, since for an English speaker the order is confusing; the object is in first position and the verb is at the end, contrary to the normal word order of English. If the Latin sentence were rewritten as:

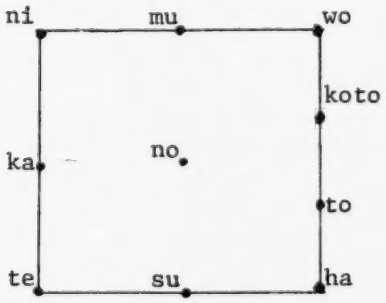
Matrem puella amat.
(acc.) (nom.)

the addition of case indicators would aid the English reader to arrive at the proper internal sentence 'the girl loves her mother', assuming that he knows the meaning of the grammatical terms 'accusative' and 'nominative'.

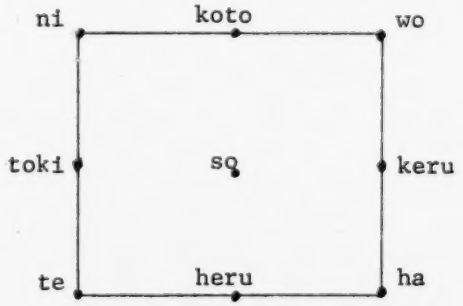
4.3. Somewhat parallel to Medieval Western civilization, which was dominated by Christianity, the Nara-Heian era of Japanese history developed its culture under the strong influence of the flourishing religions imported from China. Thus the development of the Japanese writing system, including the te-ni-wo-ha, was nurtured by the leaders, or 'doctors', of the different sects of religion, among which the Bukke 'The House of Buddhism' and the Juke 'The House of Confucius' are probably the best known.[11]

4.4. It is noteworthy that each of these two Houses maintained a different wo-koto ten chart for their own interpretation (reading) of their religious material written in Chinese. Even the charts used in individual temples of the same House could differ. Certain contrasts may be seen in the following examples:

Ki-ten
of the Juke House



Endō-ten
of the Bukke House



4.5. As already discussed, the major function of the wo-koto-ten was to aid Japanese in reading the syntactically unrelated Chinese primarily by indicating the proper syntactic relationships expressed in spoken Japanese by particles. However, because of the different decoding systems provided by each House, and the further variations among the members of each House, some critics have asserted that the wo-koto ten chart was not simply a system to aid in interpreting the syntax of the Chinese language; they

say it also served as a coding device for maintaining the secrecy of religious interpretation belonging to the sect itself.

Ōtsubo has challenged this theory by pointing out that (1) while Buddhism was continuing its expansion during the Heian period and on into the Kamakura period, the wo-koto ten, was decreasing in popularity; (2) the wo-koto ten, in its earlier stages, was rather simple to memorize; (3) the wo-koto ten always paralleled the use of kana (which any priest or scholar from any House could read) at the same time; and (4) there were occasions when two or more different sects adopted the same or similar charts (Ōtsubo 1961:29-38). It may be because of this fragmentation of the wo-koto ten system and/or because of the increased use of the once-disdained hiragana among scholars that the use of the dots declined rapidly after its earlier flourishing period. It appears that during the Kamakura period their use had declined almost to the point of disappearing from ordinary, non-technical literary usage.

4.6. The concept of the te-ni-wo-ha, however, tenaciously remained. Kindaichi elaborates upon the implications of the te-ni-wo-ha (or sometimes te-ni-ha) class in the minds of the people during the Middle Ages in Japan as a significant word-element which is more than a combination of four-corner letters on the wo-koto ten chart. He cites a medieval soldier-scholar, Yūsai Hosokawa (1534-1610), as saying that te-ni-wo-ha are 出似葉 (to be read te-ni-ha, but meaning 'like sprouting leaves'). The purpose of his pun is to point out that one cannot know the names of a tree or a grass without seeing the leaves. Only by the characteristics of the 'sprouting leaves' can one tell the difference between one plant and another (Kindaichi 1957:14-6). Similarly the te-ni-wo-ha serves to clarify the syntactic function of the constituents of a sentence for a better understanding of what is written.

4.7. Today the term te-ni-wo-ha is still used, although the wo-koto ten system itself has long since passed from memory. It may be that the Manyō-gana innovators can be credited with something of a moral victory in that the hiragana (which students of Japanese know are simplifications of kanji 'Chinese characters') used for writing all particles in Japanese today are merely phonological representations and contain no graphic, inherently syntactic indication of meaning. The name for these particles, then, comes from one source (meaning) while their written form comes from another (sound). This brief discourse may not make the study of Japanese any easier nor the learning of the intricacies of Japanese particles any more palatable, but hopefully it will increase our appreciation of the generally misunderstood term te-ni-wo-ha.

Footnotes

[1] The author expresses her gratitude to Professors Archibald A. Hill of the Department of Linguistics, University of Texas at Austin, and Harvey M. Taylor of the Department of East Asian Languages, University of Hawaii, for their constructive criticisms and suggestions.

[2] According to David Diringer (1962:83-7), the Japanese have never had a truly indigenous writing system. Even though the Jindai Moji (or Kamiyo Moji--characters of the Divine Period) did exist, it is generally accepted that even these systems were descended from the Nitok script of Korea.

[3] The typological classification discussed here is adopted from August Schleicher, Die Sprachen Europas in Systematischer Uebersicht (Bonn: H.B. König, 1850), pp. 7-9, as cited in Horne (1966:16).

[4] The Manyō-gana represents 'a phonetic transcription device to write Japanese syllables and words phonetically, without reference to the semantic value of the Chinese character in Chinese'. (Miller 1967:33) It is called Manyō-gana, because a contemporary anthology of poems, the Manyō-shū, were written in this style. The early history and development of Japanese particles is largely revealed by the study of poetry in the Nara and the following Heian periods. For a translation of the anthology, see the Manyō-shū (1965).

[5] Though we are primarily concerned with the use of the wo-koto ten in relation to the te-ni-wo-ha in this paper, it should be noted that these served other purposes as well. Some other uses of the wo-koto charts were to indicate the copular usage (inflected verbal endings); to provide punctuation marks; to distinguish proper names such as geographical places, persons, and titles of books. The kaeri-ten or okuri-gana of later periods had functions similar to those listed above. For a more detailed discussion of these other functions of the wo-koto ten, see Hashimoto (1949:283-5).

[6] Here 'this' refers to poem no. 4175, Vol. 19 of the Manyō-shū.

[7] Here 'this' refers to poem no. 4176, Vol. 19 of the Manyō-shū.

[8] English translations unless otherwise noted have been supplied by the author.

[9] It is interesting to note here that in contrast with the ordinary manner of reading (beginning at the right side of the page reading down the column), the order of te-ni-wo-ha begins at the bottom left and reads up and to the right (clockwise).

[10] The distinction of Japanese verbs as "transitive" and "intransitive" verbs is rather typical of Ōtsuki's grammar, a point which presents a combination (if not a direct import from Western grammar) of Japanese and Western word class classification.

[11] For a detailed history of each 'House', its membership, its temples, and the characteristics of their adopted wo-koto ten, see Hashimoto (1949:283-6).

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